

**CEPPS/IRI Final Quarterly Report
April-June, 2005**

POLITICAL PARTY STRENGTHENING PROGRAMS IN LATIN AMERICA

USAID Cooperative Agreement No. DGC-A-00-01-00004-00

Project Dates: June 1, 2003-April 30, 2005

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Expenses to Date: \$228,386.95

I. SUMMARY

During the early and mid 1990s, Latin America appeared to be a region well on its way to democratic consolidation. In 1992, 21 of the region's 23 countries boasted competitive elections, more open markets, and improved human rights records. This was a marked improvement over the region's state of affairs just a decade earlier, when authoritarian regimes and economic crises were the order of the day.

Skepticism about the democratic system is growing in the wake of civil conflicts, economic downturns, and unchecked corruption throughout the region. A 2002 *Latinobarometro* poll showed that in two thirds of Latin American countries the number of people that believed that democracy was preferable to any other kind of government had shrunk considerably since 1996. IRI believes that Latin American democracies remain fragile and vulnerable in part because of weak democratic institutions. Political parties throughout the region consistently ranked poorly in terms of confidence and approval ratings. These parties are perceived to be self-serving and out of touch with their constituencies. Democracy strengthening efforts which focus on accountability and transparency within institutions such as political parties are vital to renewing public faith in the democratic system.

In an effort to continue the promotion of democratic institutions and principles, the IRI Latin America and Caribbean division launched a Regional Political Party Renovation Program. The program includes participants from six countries: Argentina, Bolivia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico, and Nicaragua. IRI offered political parties the opportunity to strengthen their commitment to good governance, party development, and civic involvement. It also afforded participants the opportunity to share lessons learned in the consolidation of democratic institutions.

II. BACKGROUND

IRI's Regional Party Strengthening program was designed to encourage the development of

more open and representative party institutions. This approach included the assessment of factors influencing party development and obstacles to democratic reform. It entailed the organization of regional conferences to develop a regional network of party reformists, as well as follow through in-country training activities to promote the implementation of reforms. The program was executed through three mechanisms: 1) a series of regional conferences and workshops, individual party capacity building trainings and consultation meetings with party leaders; 2) online political training courses; and 3) development of a regional network of party reformists. A summary of pilot project activities and results follows.

Regional Seminar Series I

IRI launched the pilot project by surveying political party leaders on the internal factors impeding internal party democratization. The seminars were based on the premise that active citizen participation in political parties is vital to their survival. The seminars also allowed for a quantitative and qualitative assessment of the parties. The results were surprising, yet ultimately encouraging: after superficially blaming external factors such as a civil society bent on dismantling political parties, unsympathetic media, and unfair electoral laws, party leaders ultimately began taking responsibility for the state of party credibility. Of all participants, 63% confirmed that the party direction is determined by the party head, with only 9% acknowledging that decisions are driven in part by the inclusion of constituent demands. They recognized their party weaknesses, and began identifying the internal behaviors and norms at the root of their parties' problems, including weak channels of communication with constituents, ineffective internal communications, lack of training, and opaque financial management systems.

Overall, IRI observed rather closed and centralized Latin American political party organizations. They function at the command of an inaccessible party leadership, which remains distant and alienated from contact with the citizenry at large, leaving obstructed those channels of constructive communication with the very people that parties were meant to represent. The opportunity to survey multiple parties from very different countries, and identify clear commonalities regarding weaknesses and challenges, was invaluable, and reinforced the regional approach to party strengthening and modernization efforts.

Regional Conference I

IRI organized a two-day regional conference of high-level decision makers supportive of party reform from all participating political parties. The event established a regional network of party practitioners committed to democratic renovation. It also provided a venue for comprehensive discussion of party self-perception and the development of a common set of challenges that must be addressed to further political party reform and democracy strengthening in the region. The key challenges are to: (1) promote internal party democratization via the dismantling of opaque and outdated procedures and practices; (2) increase opportunities for civic participation and outreach to marginalized groups; (3) foster new leadership development; and (4) secure accountable governance and greater transparency in party finances, both during and between elections. Although the themes are general, the fact that they were voiced by the representatives of all the 20 political parties that participated illustrates a significant understanding among practitioners of the challenges they face as a region.

The identification of common challenges allowed IRI to consolidate its approach in providing the political parties the requisite technical support and assistance to face them. As a result, IRI and its consultant developed a second seminar series to provide the framework for the development of party renovation projects.

Regional Seminar Series II

The second seminar series was a case study analysis of four political parties in Latin America and Europe that have effectively strengthened their party base through party reforms and subsequently achieved success in elections and governance. The parties studied included Spain's Popular Party, Britain's Labour Party, Germany's Christian Democratic Union and El Salvador's ARENA party. The seminar, "*Renovarse o Desaparecerse*" (Renew or Disappear), provided each party with an opportunity to review these cases and identify specific measures these parties took to modernize. The series advanced the project's ultimate objective of forcing the Latin American political parties to begin thinking concretely about reform and identify one or two strategies for long term implementation.

Following the seminar, IRI asked all parties to develop a 12-month reform/renewal plan focusing on one or two strategies derived from the case studies workshop. At a second regional conference held February 2005 the parties were given the opportunity to present these proposals to a panel of party experts, including representatives from the parties addressed in the case study analysis.

Regional Conference II

The regional conference provided parties with an environment in which they could benefit from the experience and expertise of leaders from the case study parties analyzed in the seminar series and enabled them to create concrete and viable blueprints for reform. The format and dynamic of the working groups on the second day of the conference proved particularly useful for party members because they were forced to objectively evaluate their own work plans. IRI was impressed with the parties' presentations of their work plans and the forthright discussion and constructive suggestions that followed. The parties' critical self-analysis and open reception to the commentary of the moderators and of their peers indicated a real dedication to the task of effecting long term party renewal.

E-Learning

IRI partnered with the *Escuela de Gobierno Tomas Moro* (EGTM) to develop on-line courses that would provide sustained and substantive political training on targeted issues: leadership development, political management and political strategy. Each eight week course employed a methodology of tutored self teaching, with tutors supervising student learning and completion of homework and projects.

IRI and EGTM have received numerous communications from participants, particularly from the younger students, expressing appreciation for the scholarships and emphasizing the great need for continued support in capacity building. Specifically, the students credit IRI with arming them

with the tools necessary to positively affect their political parties' democratic development.

The course curriculum is extremely detailed and comprehensive. The format allows for students to work with others from throughout the region, share best practices and to discuss common challenges. Course projects encourage a greater understanding of themes addressed, and motivated the students to use the tools presented in the weekly e-classes. To date, over 200 party activists have enrolled in the courses, and have formed working groups with peers outside of their own parties and countries. This is critical because it reinforces the development of a well-prepared regional network of individuals dedicated to promoting party democratization. Although there are benefits to organizing in-person trainings with an expert on a given issue, the e-learning allows for sustained exposure and greater understanding of key democratic values.

In-Country Follow Through Trainings

Concurrent with the online coursework, IRI also provided individual party follow-up training. Working with the parties as a whole was central to maintaining the momentum established in the seminar series. The individual party trainings, however, allowed IRI to address unique challenges each party faces based on varying political circumstances. These needs were identified during the first seminars and at the conclusion of the last conference.

IRI provided nascent political forces in Argentina with training in strategic planning and party consolidation. In Ecuador, IRI conducted individual trainings with ID, Pachakutik, PSC and the Fundacion Quellkaj on use of grassroots investigation, polls, and strategic communication during campaigns. IRI held a decentralization conference in Mexico City for the Mexico State chapter of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional. In Nicaragua, the regional program supported a series of trainings in ethics and good governance for candidates for municipal elections throughout the country.

This sampling of the various trainings IRI conducted throughout the pilot year in response to specific requests from party leaders in each country is a testament to the diverse needs of the parties involved. It is also an indication of the Institute's ability to use the current political environment as the context to push reform-oriented activities. In Ecuador, for example, the campaign trainings on grassroots outreach and communication had a heavy focus on constituent outreach, and the political benefit of consistently engaging citizens, before and after elections. Candidate training in Nicaragua provided tools for good governance, and the understanding that transparent and ethical administration while in office was the first step toward re-election. By tying party democratization directly to party success, IRI reinforces the principle that renovation is not simply a quixotic endeavor.

Regional Reformist Network

As mentioned, a central objective of the pilot project was the establishment of a strong regional network of party reformists. The Institute's experience in other regions, such as Eastern Europe, indicates that many of the problems that continue to plague political parties in more advanced democracies are different in degree but not in kind from the challenges facing parties in less-advanced democracies: outreach to marginalized sectors, consistent programmatic and

ideological image, internal democratic procedure, and opportunity for internal advancement. In this reality, the value of country-to-country contact cannot be underestimated. Valuable lessons learned and best practices from the region represent an important component in the overall effort to modernize Latin America's political parties. Although there are other international organizations that have created venues to bring parties together to share experiences, these other forums are largely academic, and do not allow the parties to focus on the technical and practical issues they must address in order to strengthen democratic development.

III. QUARTERLY ACTIVITIES

This project ended on April 30, 2005. The last month of activities was dedicated to preparing feedback and evaluations for the parties on the party reform workplans they presented last quarter, as well as delivering all certificates of completion to passing EGTM students.

Party Evaluations

In February 2005 IRI held the final regional conference for this project. The purpose of this conference was to bring together "reform teams" from each of the parties involved in the project to present their 12-month party reform workplans. (Please refer to the January-March 2005 quarterly for a fully detailed report on this conference.)

With each presentation, IRI circulated an evaluation form to all other party representatives in the audience and asked for the participants' appraisal of the given work plan, including its strengths, weaknesses and greatest challenges to implementation. In addition, during a final plenary session attended by all conference participants, a moderator from each working group provided a summary of the work plans presented by their respective parties and a brief conclusion of the strengths and weaknesses of the projects proposed.

While these evaluations were tabulated for IRI reporting needs during the month of March, and submitted in the last quarterly, it was during the month of April that these results were communicated on a one-by-one basis to the parties. Parties were asked to take these observations into consideration and re-submit workplans so that they might be included in the new regional project, launched in May 2005. IRI has received re-tooled workplans from approximately 80% of participants. The Bolivian parties have been understandably slow to respond to this request given the political upheavals the country has recently experienced.

EGTM Diplomas

Over 170 students in six countries completed the online courses in Political Management and Leadership offered by IRI and the *Escuela de Gobierno Tomas Moro* (EGTM). During the month of April, IRI prepared and sent the diplomas to party heads for distribution within their ranks. This marked the close-out of all EGTM activities carried out under this project.

IV. EVALUATION

The final steps taken this quarter to complete this IRI project were critical in achieving one

of the central objectives of the project: that of helping the parties take systematic steps to review their existing structures, or create new ones, in order to better address constituent concerns. The regional conference held in Lima, Peru served as a catalyst for the proactive development of specific reform strategies by each party. IRI held participants to the initial verbal commitments to party democratization made nearly two years ago, and has taken them from buying into democratization to actually taking steps towards accomplishing reform.

IRI has received extremely positive feedback from participants on the utility and innovative quality of the regional conference activities and is energized by the positive strides taken by each party. As an indicator of the project's positive impact, many participants have expressed that their party would not have been motivated to initiate development of a major party renewal effort were it not for IRI's Regional Program. Moreover, the majority of the parties have contacted IRI directly to communicate their eagerness to begin the next stage of the program and fine-tune their work plans for implementation over the course of the next year. IRI is encouraged by the accomplishments of the pilot year of the regional project and committed to capitalizing on party enthusiasm to further the success seen thus far in the new project.

V. FUTURE ACTIVITIES

None.